A Short Discourse UPON THE REASONABLENESS Of *MEN*'s having a RELIGION, OR Worship of God.

By his Grace,
GEORGE Duke of BUCKINGHAM.

The Second Edition.

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TO THE READER.

WHEN I *began to write upon this Subject, it was out of a Curiosity I had to try, what I could say, in reason, against the bold Assertions of those Men, who think it a witty thing to defame Religion; and I have seen so few Writings of late, which are*

not very tedious, that I was desirous at least to avoid that fault in this, by making it as short as I could.

The Reason why I have suffer'd it to be Printed, is indeed, Because I could not help it; Coppies having been taken of it, and sent to the Press, by the negligence of some to whom I lent it to Read. I was as much ashamed to forbid the Printing of it, as I should have been, to have order'd it, or as I should be now it is Printed, to disown what I have Written; and therefore, I have here set my Name to it.

By the nature of this Discourse, I was forced to Conclude with an Opinion, which I have been long convinced of; That nothing can be more Antichristian, nor more contrary to Sense

and

and Reason, than to Trouble and Molest our Fellow-Christians, because they cannot be exactly of our Minds, in all the things relating to the Worship of God.

And who will but examine what multitudes of Men there are now amongst us, of different Perswasions in Religion; and how inconsiderable any one part of them is, compared to the rest, must, I am confident, be convinced, That the practice of it, at this time, would be of no advantage to the Publick.

If a serious consideration of the Present State of this Kingdom, can sink deep enough into Men's Hearts, to make them endeavour, now, to promote a true Liberty of Conscience, I shall yet hope to enjoy happy days in England. *But otherwise,*

wise, without pretending to be a Prophet, I can easily foresee, That the contrary must of necessity terminate in this; A General Discontent; The Dispeopleing of our poor Country; And the Exposing us to the Conquest of a Foreign Nation.

BUCKINGHAM.

A Short

A Short Discourse UPON THE REASONABLENESS Of *MEN*'s having a RELIGION, OR Worship of God.

THere is nothing that gives Men a greater dissatisfaction, than to find themselves disappointed in their Expectations; especially of those things in

which they think themſelves moſt concern'd; and therefore all, who go about to give Demonſtrations in Matters of Religion, and fail in the attempt, do not onely leave Men leſs Devout than they were before, but alſo, with great pains and induſtry, lay in their Minds the very Grounds and Foundations of Atheiſm: For the generality of Mankind, either out of lazineſs, or a diffidence of their being able to judge aright in Points that are not very clear, are apt rather to take things upon truſt than to give themſelves the trouble to examine whether they be true or no. But when they find, that what a Man undertakes to give them for a Demonſtration, is really none at all, they do not onely conclude they are deceived by him, but begin alſo to ſuſpect, they have been ill uſed, by thoſe, who firſt impos'd upon them a Notion,

Notion, for which no Demonſtration can be given; and from that ſuſpicion proceed to this other of a more dangerous conſequence; That what is not demonſtrable, may perhaps too not be true.

I ſhall, therefore in this Diſcourſe, make uſe of another method, and content my ſelf with endeavouring to ſhew what, in my Opinion, is moſt probable: Demonſtration being, as to Matters of Faith, abſolutely unneceſſary: Becauſe, if I can convince a Man, That the Notions I maintain are more likely to be true than Falſe, it is not in his power not to believe them; no Man believing any thing becauſe he has a mind to believe it, but becauſe his Judgment is convinc'd, and he cannot chooſe but believe it, whether he will or no: and Belief is all that is required of us in the Speculative part of Religion.

Beſides, Demonſtration being ſuch an Evidence of a thing, as ſhows the contrary of it to be impoſſible; it is, if you mark it, a whimſical kind of expreſſion to ſay, That a Man does but believe a thing to be ſo, which he is ſure cannot poſſibly be otherwiſe. It is juſt as ingenious as if one ſhould profeſs, That he hopes he ſhall but begin to have a thing to morrow, which he is already this day in poſſeſſion of. Belief and Faith being as intirely ſwallow'd up in Demonſtration, as Hope is in Fruition.

My deſign in this Paper is, To induce Men to a belief of Religion, by the ſtrength of Reaſon; and therefore, I am forc'd to lay aſide all Arguments which have any dependence upon the Authority of Scripture, and muſt faſhion my Diſcourſe as if I had to do with thoſe that have no Religion at all.

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The first main Question, upon the clearing of which I shall endeavour to ground the *Reasonableness of Men's having a Religion, or Worship of God*, is this, *Whether it is more probable that the World has ordered it self to be in the Form it now is, or was contriv'd to be so by some other Being of a more perfect, and more designing nature?* For whether or no the World has been Created out of nothing, is not material to our purpose; Because if a supreme Intelligent Agent has fram'd the World to be what it is, and has made us to be what we are, we ought as much to stand in awe of it, as if it had made both us and the World out of nothing. Yet because this latter Question ought not to be totally pass'd by, I shall take the liberty to offer some Conceptions of mine upon it.

The chief Argument used against God Almighty's having Created the World,

World, is, That no Man can imagine how a thing ſhould be made out of nothing; and that, therefore, it is impoſſible, he ſhould have made the World, becauſe there is nothing elſe, out of which it could be made.

Firſt then, I cannot chooſe but obſerve, that to ſay, Becauſe we are not able to imagine how a thing ſhould be, therefore the being of that thing muſt be impoſſible, is in it ſelf a diſingenious way of Argumentation, eſpecially in thoſe, who at the ſame time declare they believe this World to be Eternal, & yet are as little able to comprehend how it ſhould be Eternal, as how it ſhould be made out of nothing.

In the next place, I conceive that nothing can be properly ſaid to endure, any longer than it remains juſt the ſame; for in the inſtant any part of it is changed, that thing as it was before, is no more in being.

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In the third place, That every part of this World we live in is changed every moment; and by conſequence, that this whole World is ſo too, becauſe the whole is nothing elſe but what is compoſed of every part; and that therefore we cannot properly ſay, this World has continued for many Ages, but onely that all things in this World have been changed for ſeveral Years together.

To evade which Opinion, thoſe who maintain the Eternity of the World, are forc'd to ſay; That the Matter of it is not changed, but the Accidents onely; though this be a ſort of Argument which they will not allow of in others. For when it is by the *Romaniſts* urged, in Defence of *Tranſubſtantiation* in the Sacrament, *That the Accidents of the Wafer remain, though the Subſtance of it be changed*; they reject that as a ridiculous Notion; and yet it is not one jot more

abſurd

abſurd to ſay, *That the Accidents remain when the Matter is chang'd, than that the Matter remains when the Accidents are changed*; nay of the two, the Aſſertors of this latter Opinion are the leaſt excuſable, becauſe they boldly attribute it to a Natural Cauſe, whereas the *Romaniſts* have the modeſty at leaſt to own it for a Myſterious Miracle.

But that the weakneſs of this imagination, of ſeparating Accidents from Bodies may the plainlier appear, let us examine a little what the meaning of the word Accident is. Accident then does not ſignifie a Being diſtinct from Body or Matter, but is only a Word, whereby we expreſs the ſeveral ways we conſider of what is in a Body, or matter that is before us. For example; If we perceive a Body to have length, then we conſider of that length as an Accident of that Body; and when we perceive

perceive a Body to have a Smell, or Taſte, then we conſider of that Smell, and that Taſte, as Accidents of that Body: But in none of theſe Conſiderations we mean, that any thing can have Length, or Smell, or Taſte, but what really is Body; and when any thing, that had a Smell or Taſte, has left off to have a Smell or Taſte, it is, becauſe that Part of it, which had a Smell or Taſte, is no more in it. So that, upon an Examination of the whole Matter, I am apt to believe, That there can be naturally no change of Accidents, but where there is a real change of Bodies.

But to proceed a little further, the Queſtion being, *Whether it be more probable, that the World, or that God Almighty has been from all Eternity?* I think, I may adventure to affirm, That of two Propoſitions, the leaſt probable

is that which comes nearest to a Contradiction: Now nothing can come nearer to a Contradiction, Than Eternity, or abiding the same for ever, and a continued Changing, or not abiding the same one moment: And therefore I conclude, it is less probable, that this Changeable World should have been from all Eternity, than that some other Being, of more Excellence, and greater Perfection, should be so, whose very Nature is incapable of Change.

That Being of more Excellence, and greater Perfection, I call *God*; and those, who out of a foolish aversion they have for the *Name of God*, will call it Nature, do not in any kind differ from this Notion of that Being, but only change its Name, and rather shew, they have a vain mistaken Ambition of being thought Atheists, than that they have any Reason strong enough

nough to Convince them to be ſo.

The next Queſtion I ſhall take into Conſideration, is this, *Whether, though there be a* God, *it is probable, that He ſhould take a more particular Care of Mankind, than He does of Beaſts and other Animals?* To which I have this to offer, That though there are ſeveral ſorts of Animals, which give us occaſion to imagine they have ſome kind of Reaſon in them, though not to ſo great a Perfection as Men have; yet ſince no other Animal did ever any one thing, that could give us the leaſt cauſe to believe, they have a Conception of another World, or of a Deity; and that no Man was ever yet born, but had a Conception, or at leaſt, a Suſpicion of it, more or leſs. I ſay, for this Reaſon, it is probable, in my Opinion, That there is ſomething nearer a-kin to the Nature of *God* in Men, than

there is in any other Animals whatsoever; and for that Reason, that *God Almighty* does take a more particular Care of us, than He does of them.

If then *God* be Eternal, and it is probable there is something in our Nature, which is a-kin to the Nature of *God*, it is also probable, That that Part of us never dies.

It is also probable, That what by it we are prompted most to value and esteem, as the highest Perfections, good Qualities, and Vertues, are Parts of the Essence, and Nature of *God*.

Now, of all good Qualities, or Vertues, it is Justice; which all Men do most highly esteem and value in others, though they have not all the good Fortune to practise it themselves. For Justice is that good Quality, or Vertue, which causes all other good Qualities or Vertues

tues to be esteemed; nay, it is that Vertue, without which, all other Vertues become as Vices; that is, they all come to be abhorr'd.

For he who wants Justice, and has Wit, Judgment, or Valor, will for the having Wit, Judgment, or Valor, be the more abhorr'd; Because the more Wit, Judgment, or Valor he has, if he wants Justice, the more he will certainly become a Wicked Man: And he who wants Justice, and has Power, will for the having that Power, be the more abhorr'd; Because the more Power he has, if he wants Justice, the more he will certainly become a Wicked Man: And therefore, in my Opinion, it is a very unreasonable thing for Men, out of a Design of extolling *God Almighty*'s Power, to rob Him of Justice; the Quality without which, even Power it self must necessarily be abhorr'd. And

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pray what can be more diſreſpectful to *God Almighty*, Than to phanſie that he ſhall puniſh us for doing that, which he has from all Eternity predeſtinated; that is, Compell'd us to do? It is an Act that I can hardly believe there ever yet was born a Man cruel enough to be guilty of, even in the depth of his Revenge; And ſhall we make that an Attribute of the Moſt Perfect, and the Moſt High *God*, which is beneath the effect of the meaneſt of Paſſions in the worſt of Men? It is, in my Opinion, more reaſonable to believe, That *God Almighty*, out of his Love to Mankind, has given us an Eternal Soul; That an Eternal Being, and Free-will, are things in their Nature inſeparable one from the other; and that therefore, according to our Actions, proceeding from our Wills, *God Almighty*, in Juſtice, will Reward and

Puniſh

Punish us in another World, for the Good and Ill Deeds we perform in this. I do not say, that the best of our Actions here, are good enough to make us deserve the utmost Joys of Heaven; we must owe them to *God Almighty*'s Grace and Favour, as indeed, we owe all things else.

Neither will I take upon me to guess at the several Degrees of Joys there are in Heaven. Our dull Senses, making it as impossible for us to discourse well of those things, as it is impossible for a Man Born Blind, to talk well of Colours. Nor will I pretend to judge how long, or how much *God Almighty* will Punish us hereafter; Because, for the same Reason that we think him to be a *God* of Justice, we must also conclude him to be a *God* of Mercy.

This only I do verily believe, *That the more we Love him, the more he will*

will Love us; and the less we Love him, the worse it will be for us.

Again, if this Instinct, or Conception, we have of a Deity, be the Ground of our Religion, it ought also to be the Guide of our Religion; That is, if the strongest Reason we have to believe, That *God Almighty* does take a more particular Care of us, than He does of other Animals, is, Because there is something in our Nature, nearer a-kin to the Nature of *God*, than any thing that is in any other Animal; I say, in all Reason, that part of us, which is neareſt a-kin to the Nature of God, ought to be our Guide and Director, in Chooſing the beſt Way for our Religious Worſhip of *God*.

There is also this other Conſequence, which, in my Opinion, does naturally depend upon what has been ſaid; That one

one of the greateſt Crimes a Man can be guilty of, is, To force us to act or ſin againſt that Inſtinct of Religion, which *God Almighty* has placed in our Hearts; for, if that Inſtinct be ſomewhat a-kin to the Nature of *God*, the ſinning againſt it muſt be ſomewhat a-kin to the Sin againſt the *Holy Ghoſt*.

If then it be probable, that there is a *God*, and that this *God* will Reward and Puniſh us hereafter, for all the Good and Ill things we act in this Life; It does highly concern every Man, to examine ſeriouſly, Which is the beſt Way of Worſhipping and Serving this *God*; That is, Which is the beſt Religion.

Now, if it be probable, that the Inſtinct which we have within us, of a Deity, be a-kin to the Nature of *God*; That Religion is probably the beſt,

whose Doctrine does most recommend to us those things, which, by that Instinct, we are prompted to believe are Vertues, and good Qualities: And that I think, without exceeding the Bounds of Modesty, I may take upon me to affirm, Is the Christian Religion.

And for the same Reason, it does also follow, That the Religion amongst *Christians*, which does most recommend to us Vertue, and a good Life, is, in all probably, the best Religion.

And here, I must leave every Man to take pains, in seeking out, and chusing for himself; he only being answerable to *God Almighty* for his own Soul.

I began this *Discourse*, as if I had to do with those, who have no Religion at all: And now, addressing

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my ſelf to *Chriſtians*, I hope, they will not be offended at me, for ending it with the Words of our *Saviour*:

Ask, and it ſhall be given you; Seek, and you ſhall find; Knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you.

I ſhall beg Leave farther, only to propoſe a few Queſtions to all thoſe, in general, who are pleas'd to call themſelves *Chriſtians*.

Firſt, Whether there be any thing more directly oppoſite to the Doctrine and Practice of *Jeſus Chriſt*, than to uſe any kind of Force upon Men, in Matters of Religion? And conſequently, Whether all thoſe that practiſe it, (let them be of what *Church*, or *Sect*, they pleaſe) ought not juſtly to be call'd *Antichriſtians*?

Secondly, Whether there can be any thing more unmanly, more barbarous, or more ridiculous, than to go about to convince a Man's Judgment by any thing, but by Reaſon? It is ſo ridiculous, that Boys at School are whipped for it; who inſtead of Anſwering an Argument with Reaſon, are Loggerheads enough to go to Cuffs.

And *Thirdly*, Whether the Practice of it, has not always been ruinous and deſtructive to thoſe Countries, where it has been uſed, either in Monarchies, or Common-Wealths? And, Whether the contrary Practice has not always been ſucceſsful to thoſe Countries, where it has been uſed, either in Monarchies, or Common-Wealths?

I ſhall Conclude, with giving them this Friendly Advice; If they would be

be thought Men of Reaſon, or of a good Conſcience, Let them endeavour, by their good Counſel, and good Example, to perſwade others to lead ſuch Lives, as may ſave their Souls: And not be perpetually quarrelling amongſt themſelves, and cutting one another's Throats, about thoſe things, which they all agree, are not abſolutely neceſſary to Salvation.

FINIS.

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thought Men of Reason, or of a good Conscience. Let them endeavour, by their good Counsel, and good Example, to perswade others to lead such Lives, as may have their Souls: And not be perpetually quarrelling amongst themselves, and casting one another's Throats, about those things, which they all agree, are not absolutely necessary to Salvation.

FINIS.

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